

SOILS AND ENVIRONMENT by S. Ellis and A. Mellor, Routledge, London, 1995. No. of pages: xx + 364. Price: £16.99 (pb). ISBN 0-415-06888-6.

An understanding of environmental processes is fundamental to environmental management: this book should take its rightful place as a significant contribution to that basic context-oriented understanding.

Soils are a central component of ecosystems and a resource used by people. As such, their characteristics reflect and are influenced by environmental processes, and their use impinges upon the wider environment. This book is placed centrally in these themes, covering soil constituents and properties (Chapter 2) and soil formation and characteristics in relation to their surrounding environment (Chapters 3 and 4). Soils are also seen in relationship to the hydrosphere, atmosphere, geosphere and biosphere (Chapter 6) and also as a legacy of past processes (Chapter 5). Soils and land use are tackled (Chapter 7), and soils in relation to environmental problems are discussed (Chapter 8) together with soil survey and land evaluation (Chapter 9).

Authoritative books can be dull while stimulating books can be superficial; this book is neither dull or superficial but manages to be both authoritative and stimulating. The study

of soils can be seen as too scientific and off-putting to students. However, many students are stimulated by environmental issues, and this book has hit the nail on the head by explaining the science in a lucid and relevant fashion, and by placing soils in an environmental context.

Up-to-date and well illustrated with line drawings and colour photographs, the volume combines the fundamental knowledge basic to soil science with the applications of that science to today's environmental issues. It is thoroughly recommended for intermediate levels, say second year university, but is also of use at more introductory levels. Further reading will be needed at a third year level where a more questioning attitude is expected: the book does not always examine the data presented in a critical light and interpretations are often assumed rather than discussed. I would, however, be happy to recommend this book on any university second year soils course I was teaching.

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